

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

Piano Basics Foundation News

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Next Deadline: August 1, 2009

Good Child, Bad Child

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
October 8, 1991
Reprinted in the Newsletter, Special Issue No. 4
September 22, 2007
Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg
Illustrations by Juri Kataoka

When my elder child was young, he was always smiling and was considered to be "a great child." He always did what I asked him to do: "Don't touch that...don't walk around, just sit still..." On the train from Matsumoto to Shinjuku, when I said, "Let's sit here and look out the window," he would remove his shoes and sit in the same

spot smiling till we arrived at our destination. People would compliment me, saying they had never met such a good child. Being a mother, I would feel so proud, arrogantly concluding that I had done a good job raising him.



For my convenience, he did not attend kindergarten, but for some reason when he started school, he was not able to do things as well as other children. He seemed to be more athletic than average, just like his grandfather who once held the record in Japan as an intermediate-distance runner. However,

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during physical education class, my son seemed to have no motivation to run a race.



From the time he was two or three years old, he had stopped screaming. Being my child, he was no genius, but had good sense about daily routines. He was truly a child that anyone would consider praiseworthy.

During lunch at school, he dutifully obeyed his teacher whose rule was never to leave any food uneaten. So he forced himself to eat even though he never had a big appetite. Eventually he developed chronic indigestion.

When he could not overcome this condition, I took him to the late, Dr. Haruya Noguchi. Dr. Noguchi concluded that he had a weak spine, indicating that he was not aggressive. The doctor surmised he must not have been doing well in school. It was eye-opening for me.

It meant that when children are docile and listen to what adults tell them to do they often have a weak will and are also not strong physically. Now, looking back on it, it is strange to me that I conveniently assumed that he was a good child.

It really is better for children to be energetic and spirited enough to be mischievous. Eventually, they are able to study well. They talk back to you and rebel against you, cry and wail out loud. This is what a genuine really good child is all about!

Humans tend to think whatever is the most expedient is what qualifies as good. At the time, I was struck with the thought that we have to change how we think.

In contrast, my second child, a daughter, was aggressive and rebellious from birth. At the age of two, I scolded her for some kind of mischief and asked her to say "I'm sorry." She sat on the *tatami* floor bawling and screaming that she was sorry, but I could tell that she wasn't the least bit sincere. She was saying it out of spite. I could feel the intensity of her rebellion gushing out of her entire body and found myself with an unaccustomed feeling of admiration for her.

A child who is physically robust can really scream out loud and stubbornly refuse to listen to you. When you watch your child behave this way, please be heartened and celebrate in your heart how wonderfully strong and good your child is. Having taught

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Structuring a Pre-School Suzuki Piano Class: Solutions in My Studio, Part II

By Karen Hagberg

There is nothing about my piano studio that would make a visitor think it is a space for children. It is not equipped with small chairs or with children's books or toys. It is simply a piano studio with two pianos, and 20 regular folding chairs, decorated to my own taste with some paintings and photographs. It has been my experience that children generally behave better in adult surroundings. Since I expect very young children to learn to be quiet, to respect class dynamics, and to follow directions, it is best that the space not encourage other activity or provide distractions. Chairs for the children and their parents are set in a semi-circle, facing the pianos.

All the students have been listening to the recording of Book 1, and the parents have begun writing the solfège syllables above the notes in their score. Aside from the recording and the score of Book 1, I do not require that class members have any other equipment at home at this point. I don't even require a piano. Also, I use only the equipment that is already in my studio: the two pianos and the adjustable seating. I have not found it necessary to use additional materials that may be considered interesting to pre-schoolers (colorful pictures, stuffed animals, rhythm instruments, games, etc.).

I limit each class to eight students. It can be very lively on rare days when all eight show up.

Based on the principle that children thrive and learn with repetition, the structure of the class is the same every week. We begin by singing the melodies of the Book 1 pieces in solfège. As much as possible, children are asked to participate depending on the skills they already have developed. It is a really good idea to have children with a range of abilities.

I've been able to accomplish this by requiring students to continue attending the class after they have begun private lessons. Ideally, there will be some students who can play most of the right hand melodies in Book 1 along with others who have just joined the group. In this way, new people have the opportunity to see what Book 1 students can typically do, and these more experienced students (and their parents) can appreciate what they have already learned and want to share it with newcomers. This dynamic is integral to the Suzuki Method.



Singing solfège in Hagberg Studio, May 2009.

Photo by Dorothy Drake.

I ask for suggestions about which piece to sing first, and those children who have begun to learn the names of the pieces raise their hands with suggestions. When we decide on the first piece to be sung, I ask which note begins that piece, and the children who have learned this will answer. We always begin singing by checking the pitch on

the piano, so if there is a student in the class who has learned how to find the notes on the piano I ask him/her to go to the piano to play that pitch for us before we sing. Sometimes I will ask a student who knows how to find the notes to take another child to the piano, point to the correct key, and then let the other child play the pitch for us. When there is a student in the room who can play the piece, either RH or hands together, I'll ask that student to go to the piano to accompany the singing.

After hearing the correct pitch, we all begin singing when I say "Go." I ask students to get ready and to wait for "go" for everything we do so that they know about doing this before they ever go to the piano. Parents and students both sing, and parents notate their scores with the solfège syllables as we go along. More experienced parents help the newer

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parents do this by checking over what they have written in.

We continue singing Book 1 pieces in this way for the first 15-20 minutes of the 45-minute class. The long-term members of my classes are able to sing all of the pieces in the book, and a couple of the students are able to play along with all of them. New parents and students who observe the class are immediately drawn into this process. If they purchase the recording on their first visit, the child is already singing along with the rest of the class when he/she comes for the second time. Parents, who take a bit longer to pick up the skill of singing solfège, are always amazed by this ability of their own little children. Two-year-olds can sing right along with older students. I too must admit that it is quite amazing.

In addition to listening to the recording, I ask that parent and child sing together as we do in class for at least five minutes every day at home. When a parent has difficulty matching pitches, I suggest that the singing be done with the recording.

Throughout the class session, I often take time to talk with the parents about various aspects of the Suzuki Method. The comments are brief so that the flow of the class is not interrupted and so the children do not have time to lose focus. I don't plan these comments ahead of time; they flow naturally from something that happens in the course of the class. I consider the purpose of the class to be as much parent orientation as it is preparation for the student to begin private lessons.

After we sing we practice the group bow. I ask the children to line up and to walk out to a spot in front of the chairs where their parents are sitting to get

ready to bow. They learn to stay in line, to space themselves evenly while walking, to walk naturally with their hands relaxed at their sides not touching their clothes, to then stand facing the audience with a pleasant facial expression, to wait after applause begins for a piano chord, and to begin their bow on the chord. Then they learn to bow for the duration of the chord, leaning over just enough to see their toes with hands remaining at their sides. After the chord ends they learn to return to the ready position, to stand still, and to look back at the audience without changing the position of the hands and without fidgeting with clothes or touching the body. There are many details in the process of bowing that must be practiced several hundred times before a student is able to bow well on a stage. Since bow practice may be done at home without a piano, I assign it every week.

At the conclusion of the group bow, children are asked to volunteer to come to the piano. There is usually time for about three or four of them for about five minutes each. When a child comes to the piano, we bow together as we would for any regular lesson. The child must bow well and on cue before I will let them sit at the piano. When a child is too shy to bow well, or will not follow directions, I ask him/her to sit down, taking care not to be negative, but simply to state that he/she is not ready today to go to the piano. After a successful bow, I take time seating the student, often explaining what I'm doing to the parents. After seeing various children being seated in this way, parents can really appreciate the importance of the equipment and have no qualms about purchasing it, sometimes even before they begin individual lessons. I tell them not to practice unless they have 1) a real piano (not an electronic piano) and 2) footrests and an adjustable chair.

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Getting ready and bowing in Hagberg Studio, May 2009.



Photos by Dorothy Drake.

When properly seated with good posture, the student is asked to get ready with the thumb on the first note of *Twinkle*. Beginners are placed on *do* and more experienced students find the first note on their own. Then I ask them how long they can stay in ready position today. They know I want them to do it for at least a count of five. Some students want to count much higher, to one hundred or higher. Checking to see that their body, arm, wrist, and hand are relaxed and that they are touching, not depressing, the key we all begin to count when I say "Go" while the student holds the ready position calmly, not moving. If the count is not too high, we go to other fingers and do the same thing. Some students want us to count to different numbers for each finger. If the student moves, we stop counting.

If the student is able, we will do some *Twinkle* ready-go practice after the ready-position practice in either RH or LH. The more experienced students are demonstrating good *Twinkles* from beginning to end. The beginners may do just one or two fingers in a *Twinkle* rhythm before I end the lesson. In order to engage the entire class for this *Twinkle* practice, I ask the others to clap the rhythm when I say "Go." In this way they all learn the rhythms very well before they try to play them on the piano, and they all learn to begin on the cue of "Go."

At the end of the lesson I ask students to name their finger numbers in a loud, clear voice. This is a prelude to making a clear sound on the piano. After doing finger numbers we bow together again, and the lesson is over.



Finger numbers. Hagberg Studio, May 2009. Photos by Dorothy Drake

After several students come to the piano in this way, and if there is still time, all the students stand in front of my two pianos and I quiz them on finding *do*. If a student cannot yet find it, I show them where it is. After finding and playing several different *do*'s on the pianos, the students get ready to play a single *do* when I say "Go." Then they hold the note, without moving, until all the sound disappears. They do this on various pitches.

The students also play back simple patterns that I sing, such as *Re Do* or *Do Re Mi*. Occasionally I will reverse this process by playing a pattern on the piano and asking parents and students together to sing back, in solfège, what I have just played. Both parents and students are getting better at this as time goes on.

I end the class by setting out a basket of stickers. Each child chooses one.

**Members inadvertently
excluded from the directory:**

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Tampa, FL 33615
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**Welcome,
New Members!**

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4301 River Hill Lane
Louisville, KY 40207
USA 502-905-3150
Fax: 502-893-1876
charlotte@stengelhill.co

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

July 5-9, 2009

Tacoma, Washington

Suzuki Piano Basics Festival with Bruce Boiney
Contact: Jacki Block 253-759-7213
jblock@ups.edu

July 27-31, 2009

Saint Louis, Missouri

Suzuki Piano Basics Institute
with Cathy Williams Hargrave and Libby Armour
Contact: Patty Eversole 314-837-1881
<http://www.geocities.com/stlsuzukipiano/>

August, 1-15, 2009

Davis, California

International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert
Mondavi Center for the Arts
Contact: Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

October 23-24, 2009

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop with Karen Hagberg
Contact: Carole Mayers 610-354-0637
mspp@comcast.net

March 26-26, 2010

Atlanta, Georgia

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop with Karen Hagberg
Contact: Jocelyn McGuire 404-524-5800
wind_song@abraxaxis.com

April 25, 2010

Matsumoto, Japan

International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert
Harmony Hall
Contact: Karen Hagberg 585-244-0490
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com

The events listed above are for the information of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members and others. Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation does not endorse, sanction, or sponsor events.

To add or change items on this list and on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact
Karen Hagberg (kh@hagbergsuzuki.com, 585-244-0490).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

<http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/SuzukiPianoBasics>

Job Opening:

Suzuki Piano Basics teachers are particularly encouraged to apply for an opening at the Victoria Conservatory of Music in Victoria, British Columbia, beginning September 1, 2009. For details contact Dr. Jamie Syer, Head Keyboard Department jsyer@telus.net.